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Introduction

1 On 7 June, 2020, an image popped up on one-time Young British Artist Marc Quinn's Instagram feed, which was going to provide the inspiration for his next work.[1] Activist Jen Reid had been pictured with her fist raised and clenched, standing atop the empty plinth from which a statue of Bristol philanthropist and slave trader Edward Colston had only just been toppled. The Black Lives Matter protests swept the world after images of police officers killing George Floyd were recorded in the US on 25 May. They took aim at institutional racism, but also at some of the very visible vestiges of slavery in the form of monuments and statues celebrating historical figures who had, in their time, benefitted from the slave trade. In Bristol, things had been brewing for years concerning the acknowledgement of city patron Colston's involvement with the Royal African Company. Reid's picture was taken by her husband, who posted it on his Instagram.[2] It went viral and became one of the emblems of the BLM movement in Britain. Quinn decided to launch a secret project: on June 15, still under the cover of night, his team deposited a sculpture entitled *A Surge of Power (Jen Reid), 2020*, on the plinth. The Life-sized likeness of Reid, based on the viral Instagram image, was created in Quinn's studio using 3D scanning technology, and was presented in a statement as a collaboration between the artist and the Bristol activist: "The public realm feels so vital at the moment, as a space to activate ideas and create change. It feels essential in particular for public art to play its part."[3]

2 Because no formal consent was sought, it was always meant to be a temporary installation. It was also clearly presented in the joint statement as being not-for-profit, with money donated to charities chosen by Reid if sold. On 17 July, the *Guardian* art critic Jonathan Jones presented the intervention as "Marc Quinn's pop up protester."[4] Quinn had not been the first to use a guerrilla approach and give the Colston statue the

pop up treatment. In 2017, a fake heritage plaque had appeared on the plinth during Upfest, a street art festival, calling Bristol the "capital of the Atlantic slave trade" and commemorating the 12 million slaves and the 6 million among them who died as captives.[5] *The Financial Times* also suggested in 2018 that Bristol native Banksy was behind graffiti of drops of blood which had at some point adorned the monument.[6] On 13 June, Banksy had posted a sketch of his own proposal for a replacement on his Instagram: a sculpture of Colston's statue in the process of being toppled.[7]

3 Just 24 hours after Quinn's pop up was erected the mayor, Marvin Rees, and the Bristol city council ordered the removal of the illegally installed statue. Outrage also erupted, especially on Twitter, with Quinn being accused of opportunism, and his guerrilla art intervention considered seriously misjudged. Artist Thomas J. Price, who had been commissioned to create a monument to the Windrush generation, felt Quinn "colonised that space in Bristol again in a way that sabotaged the process that was going on in the city. [...] And it was a strategy that he had the money to go in and do without asking."[8] Rather than being identified as a moment of allyship, this surprise intervention was seen as appropriation on the part of a rich white male artist from London.

4 This sequence of events—of statues becoming more and more embarrassing, and of others appearing and disappearing—has shed light on two phenomena. First, the fact that the term "pop up", with its light and entertaining associations, has come to describe a lot of recent short-term artistic interventions outside of the museum or the gallery,[9] providing a new name to talk about works which have a specific history of occupying interim spaces: public art, New Genre Public Art, site-specific or environmental art. Second, this new description says something about the relation between ephemeral public art interventions and the backdrop against which they pop up. Indeed, their way of bursting onto the public stage to offer an ephemeral story is as much about directing the narrative than about having it seized by the more general context of a specific time and space. The focus of this paper is recent public art in Britain, its reinvention along more ephemeral, more site-specific lines, and how it has had to negotiate a common ground with the more commercial understanding of the pop up.

5 Short-term use of space by artists, be it artist-run spaces or public art commissions, has indeed coincided with a readiness on the part of other sectors to adopt flexible and interstitial strategies for commerce, urbanism and leisure.[10] An emerging literature on pop up geographies has concentrated on the way the pop up links the dimensions of space and time. For example, cultural geographers like Ella Harris underline that the phenomenon finds a particular instrumentality in cities characterised by recession and austerity.[11] Since I wish to address this question from the point of view not simply of art history and of public art studies, but also of British studies, the timeframe which encompasses the 2008 economic crisis and the specific political response given by the British government, is indeed particularly apt. It allows to take stock of the coexistence of both positive and pejorative uses of the term pop up, and to look into the question of instrumentality it has come to raise. This three-pronged approach from the vantage points of art history, public art studies and British studies is however very much reliant on definitions which have recently been refined by specialists of urban studies like Lauren Andres who has drawn on planning theory and on the writings of Henri Lefebvre and Michel de Certeau to show how temporary uses shape space primarily from a use value point of view,[12] but also by specialists of marketing and branding like

Charlotte Shi and Gary Warnaby and their focus on the territorialisation of brand identity.[13] What I wish to highlight here is how the fairly recent notion of place branding which has built a bridge between these two fields, urban studies and marketing, has also aligned, even if less smoothly, with that of public art studies.

Art inside and outside the museum

6 The history of British public art has been characterized by a progressive blurring of the distinction between outside and inside as a convenient dichotomy to measure degrees of publicness. At the end of 20th century, London had engaged in a spectacular cultural turn by developing a new model for a museum of modern and contemporary art of global stature with Tate Modern: this model entailed a more corporate approach to its hybrid financing, and a much more accessible, thematically arranged, audience-focused display (rather than a collection-focused one). The new landmark was envisaged not as a Bourdieusian locus of distinction and exclusion, but, according to Caroline Donnellan, as a "new kind of cultural and social forum."[14] While the streets of the city were being appropriated by business, Tate Modern was inventing a new, inclusive, cultural public space—indoors.

7 The experiential filler of the pop up as an item of attraction for event-based tourism,[15] or for commerce was also helping turn Tate Modern into one of the country's main attractions. Tate was eventizing the museum with short-term installations and performances in its Turbine Hall. This was analysed by Claire Bishop in *Radical Museology*[16] as an increased proximity of museums to big business, manifested in the scale of their architecture, which has moved the museum from its 19th century elitist, patrician model to its more recent status as populist temple of entertainment.

8 Does the notion of public space still make sense, when it is so easily annexed by commercial agendas? And can its creative potential still be tapped into by artists, the original creative class who, first in the United States in the 1970s, and then in the 1980s in the United Kingdom, transformed disused buildings and factories into temporary galleries? This was for them a way of making do with the cuts in the funding of public galleries introduced by the Thatcher government which marked the beginnings, and even launched the myth, of Young British Artists after they organised "Freeze" in 1988 in a former office block called PLA, lent to the young Goldsmiths students by the London Docklands Development Corporation. Their next exhibitions, "Modern Medicine," and "Gambler," were organised at Building One, a disused biscuit factory. The appeal of ephemeral installations in non-institutional buildings and sites then had practical motivations, but they also derived from actual artistic inspiration. In 1993, Sarah Lucas and Tracey Emin had launched "The Shop," their ephemeral two-person gallery in a shop, before Emin had gone on to open "The Tracey Emin Museum," located in a former mini-cab office on Waterloo Road from 1995 to 1998, and where she first presented her tent *Everyone I Have Ever Slept With, 1963-1995*.

9 The replacement of commemorative public sculptures and monuments by public art since the early 1970s had been adumbrated by Lawrence Alloway in his short but important article "The Public Sculpture Problem."[17] The introduction of ephemerality in these site-specific projects had played a major part. It redefined a genre in which the work, placed outside of the institution, actually takes its environment into account, occupying not merely a physical site, but a location, defined by its geographical

situation but also by its inhabitants, its history, its features and its economic identity. The pop up phenomenon which has gripped both the cultural and the commercial worlds since the beginning of the century originated in these spatial and temporal experimentations: for example, Michael Landy's 2001 *Break Down* had taken place in an empty C&A shop on Oxford street, Roger Hiorns' 2008 *Seizure* made use of a derelict South London housing estate behind Elephant and Castle, and Ben Rivers' 2015 multi-projection work was installed in the vacant Drama Block at the BBC Television Centre in Hammersmith after it closed in 2013, and while it awaited redevelopment into more than 1,000 flats, a cinema, health club, restaurants, and offices. The people who go in search of these works cannot ignore the backgrounds against which they appear: the shop, the busy streets, the neighbouring blocks of flats, soon for sale.

Pop ups popping up everywhere

10 Seasonal activities, temporary restaurants, food trucks, and nomadic shops in the form of stalls or vans are nothing really new, neither are festivals or demonstrations. Still, it seems that a widespread trend for newly-branded "pop up" ventures has swept through large and not so large cities for almost a couple of decades now, turning the combination of these two features, the ephemeral and the outdoor—or at least the incongruously sited—into a contemporary cultural phenomenon. Also, it has been given a name, "pop up," which stresses the sense of surprise it creates—in the manner of a child's pop-up book in which images rise from the page as you flip through it, or windows which open on your computer without warning—as well as the suddenness of its appearance, and its overall celerity in a world which likes to move fast. Its attraction stems from the variety of its purposes, the fact that you never know where the next ephemeral event is going to appear, and that you feel you need to experience it fast before it disappears again. Because they are events as much as places, and because they have a limited time span, pop ups create communities of privileged pilgrims who gather towards the same meeting-point with a sense of urgency and the thrill of discovery: this privilege is not necessarily social or economic but derived from access to information concerning a what, a when, and a where.

11 What is striking about this pop up craze is that it has adapted to comply with both for-profit, and not-for-profit agendas: it is both pragmatic and utopian. The pop up evokes a composite and sometimes contradictory imaginary: the temporary, the alternative, the exclusive, the democratic, the experimental, the low budget, the luxurious, the insurgent, the capitalistic, the community, the market. It is one of the manifestations of the flexibilization of our lives, whether being more flexible is understood positively, as entailing more liberty, or negatively, when it means less security, especially in the workplace. Guides, blogs, websites, apps, and locative media in general, today indicate the fleeting presence of pop up events in our area, whether stores, galleries, restaurants or bars. They are central to the pop up experience inasmuch as they locate it and date it while allowing it to retain enough mystery to make it feel, even deceptively, unique and individually-addressed—indeed, a pop up advertised over legacy media like the radio or television is no longer a pop up. The blog Dan Calladine launched in 2011, "London Pop-ups," is just one example pointing to the fact that what started out as a niche practice has now become omnipresent and is particularly adapted to social media marketing—its success often depends on online presence and

adequate mailing lists, as well as on being Instagrammable enough to be shared through camera phones. These are not just venues, outlets or places to eat: their ephemeral, pop up nature has turned them into experiences, transformative happenings which provide more than simply what they present or sell—a notion conceptualised in 1999 by B. Joseph Pine II and James H. Gilmore under the term "experience economy."[18] According to Pine and Gilmore, our global economy has entered a new stage where value is still ascribed to fungible commodities, tangible goods, and intangible services, but now also to experiences which are memorable and as such rank high on the pricing scale. Seven years later, rhetorician Richard A. Lanham described the same phenomenon but from the point of view of the consumers of experience and the premium resource they themselves provide: attention. In *The Economics of Attention*, Lanham posits that style has become central to drawing us to these experiences as the new electronic culture vies for our attention.[19] Not only are pop ups successful in vying for people's precious attention online, they then manage to draw these people away from their screens and into the world—even though they are then probably back on their phones again to post on Instagram.

12 The high value of experience and the attention that it garners then also benefit the environment in which the pop up is staged, hence the interest urban planners and architects have in the phenomenon even though it is far less permanent than buildings. While the authors of Jeffrey Hou's 2010 edited architecture volume *Insurgent Public Space*[20] have focused on the insurgent potential of these phenomena which reclaim residual spaces in a changing city, other researchers, on tourism mostly, have argued that, though not directly affecting the built environment, pop up cultural spaces host temporary activities and practices which have an enduring effect on the attractiveness of cities, and therefore on their economy—Nicola Bellini and Cecilia Pasquinelli, the editors of *Tourism in the City* in 2017, are notable examples.[21]

High-end pop ups

13 Pop ups have been the last word in marketing and brand enhancement these last few years. The pop-up allows brands to capitalise on an experience, rather than simply on a product, by introducing novelty and excitement for the benefit of consumers steeped in a culture gripped by the fear of missing out (the well-known popular culture acronym FOMO, which, Chris Hodkinson has demonstrated, is not simply an individual psychological trait, but has been co-opted by commercial advertising to initiate sales.[22]) The concept today has upscale connotations with a host of highly commercialised examples in which temporariness is a marketing strategy. In this case, the pop up is a store, a restaurant, a club, etc., that temporarily takes over a vacant space and does business there for a short time.[23] Uniqlo, Cos, Adidas, and Apple are among a long list of luxury or tech brands who have exploited the pretence of improvisation, and the fashionable allure of nomadism, with the aim of increasing the desirability of products which rely on such an appeal. Fashion is already desirable, but the pop up phenomenon increases its desirability, and so, although the trend most certainly started out in the culinary business with people setting up restaurants within their homes, it was fashion which tried to lay claim to its provenance.

14 Rei Kawakubo of Comme des Garçons is said to have kick-started the trend in 2004. She set up a temporary shop, presented as a "guerrilla store," in a unused building in

Berlin, and then opened a multitude of pop up shops for her brand, each lasting no more than a year. But these beginnings, now often chronicled as a myth of origins, are disputed, with Los Angeles fashion chain Vacant claiming to have already created short-term stores advertised to its Vacant Club members in California—while also pioneering its "guerrilla mobile retail unit," a store on the back of a Hummer SUV.[24] Controversy aside, pop ups went mainstream in the late 2000s, spreading far beyond the fashion industry. In Britain, as I explain further on, the pop up phenomenon was promoted by celebrity retail consultant Mary Portas and then-Secretary of State for communities and local government Eric Pickles as a way to regenerate commerce in the aftermath of the 2008 recession after they were appointed by David Cameron to assess the future of Britain's high streets.

15 More recently, pop ups have popped up within other spaces, with shops appearing within shops, or cafés within cafés. By making things ephemeral, fast retailing, which brings together fashion, art and shopping, has turned into a happening. Its desirability has given rise to some strange notions such as brands like Sessun or Fendi opening "permanent Pop Ups" which are simply shops in which the staging is changed every so often. In 2010, street label Airwalk designed the first "invisible pop up," with customers invited to download an app guiding them to specified public locations where they could access virtual galleries of sneakers using their smartphones. These targeted ventures are usually better value than a traditional advertising campaign and can also act as informal market research projects. They also superimpose virtual grids and connections over a physical world which is no longer simply our common space and time, but a palimpsest of worlds for myriad communities.

16 Remarkably, such ephemeral shops can also include either activism or art, thus pointing to the phenomenon's roots outside business and retail which I describe below. In 2014, Kenzo opened an activist pop up store against overfishing called #nofishnonothing with the Blue Marine Foundation. The same year, Longchamp used the pop up format to advertise its new line in collaboration with artist Sarah Morris. Indeed, brands develop fashion spaces both online and off by harnessing the values and language of the cultural landscape.[25]

Grassroots pop ups

17 The pop up phenomenon might have become associated with branding, marketing and even consumer surveys, but it was nonetheless inspired by more underground events which are mostly opposed to consumerism, when they are not straightforwardly anti-capitalistic. When turning to pop up tactics, brands have tapped into their imaginative resources and creativity. Indeed, grassroots pop ups have been either militant, or situationist, aiming at bringing people together, at finding other ways of socialising and consuming, or at protesting, but always in a creative manner. Commenting on the politics of the street in 2015 in Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly, Judith Butler has described a togetherness which is less discursive than corporeal, its embodied materiality deriving from the coming together of people. Assemblies, she argues, are politically performative.[26] This means that the very act of people coming together creates a theatre in public space, and this theatre entails a performance. Portable cinemas, gigs in laundrettes, plug-in restaurants, food trucks, are all pop ups, and so are shower buses for the homeless, guerrilla gardening, parking days—when you

occupy a parking space with something other than a car—or temporary skate ramps. Pop up urban beaches inspired by Paris Plage—the artificial beach created by the Seine every summer since 2002—are to be found in Berlin and London, with events like Brixton Beach, or Neverland London in Fulham; they make an interim use of traffic lanes for the purpose of defending both new modes of socialising in big cities, and of reducing car pollution.[27] Another interim initiative was when UK-based charity 3Space temporarily took on several vacant JJB Sports stores after the company's collapse into administration in 2012, opening them up for uses including an upcycling workshop aimed at the homeless and a much needed drop-in clinic for men in deprived areas of Glasgow.

18 A major link between grassroots pop ups and artistic practice was explained at the end of the 20th century when Nicolas Bourriaud theorised the social turn in art under the label "relational aesthetics." His influential, but also vigorously criticised book of the same name came out in France in 1998 and was translated into English in 2002. In it, he links the ideas of relational aesthetics to the concept of "micro-utopias", which manifest as small-scale prototypes for DIY temporary communities, either online or offline. These can take the shape of free stores and bicycle repair shops, micro-libraries, or food gardens, but can also, in all their shapes and forms, be projects initiated and conducted by artists acting as facilitators as much as they act as makers: Rirkrit Tiravanija's shared meals or, in Britain, Gillian Wearing's, Phil Collins' or Jeremy Deller's participative performances, videos, and photographs. They are also striking examples of the, mostly, grassroots trend of pop ups.

19 This very wide appeal of the pop up, running the gamut from activists to luxury brands, is surprising at first. But the distinctive aesthetic of grassroots models—which Mara Ferreri[28] has identified as often comprising such festival features as bunting, boards with chalk hand lettering, pallet wood and upcycled furniture—can easily be appropriated and even hijacked by the mainstream. This is why the pop up, flexible and relatively free from constraints, and at first a citizen, bottom-up initiative, seems to have progressively been initiated by, and used for the benefit of big business.

Time as experience, space as real estate

20 In Britain, and in London in particular, real estate has come to rank as one of the most profitable sectors of investment. That profitability does not necessarily rely on a permanent occupation by owners of renters, and sometimes, the vacancy of some buildings increases their profitability. In the context of accommodation and real estate, "meanwhile" initiatives were at first alternative, the repurposing of vacant buildings or sites a way of countering crises. Although an adaptive lifestyle can be a choice, it is probably more often a constraint. Still, citizen-led urban developments and experiments with temporary urban interventions in a variety of settings have also inspired profit-driven urban development, with the added touch of creativity, and desirability. Of course, empty lots and vacant buildings have long been used by artists and by the wider creative class, providing the latter with the thrill of the unknown and the almost dangerous, but often resulting in commercial appropriation and gentrification, something Neil Smith demonstrated in 1996 in *The New Urban Frontier*.[29] Smith makes use of the topos of the "frontier," both as a spatial notion and as an

experimental practice, to describe urban sites undergoing rapid transformations and where empty derelict buildings or land become attractive sites.

21 Indeed, in a context of austerity, temporary uses appear both inside and outside the neoliberal dynamic by appealing both to creative minds—the members of the rising creative class described, and supported, by Richard Florida in 2002[30]—and to developers wishing to maximise their investments and to monetise a specific experience. Shoreditch is probably the most striking example for this process at work in London since the beginning of the century. This explains why recent publications on temporary urbanism have ranged from the genuinely enthusiastic to the much more guarded. Bloggers Joroen Beekmans and Joop de Boer's 2014 *Pop-Up City*[31] surveys a variety of modular and meanwhile inventions and argues that in a world which is becoming more fluid, citizens, enterprises, and civic governments are coming up with ingenious solutions to deal with a permanent state of change, and the pop up is a central tool of this strategy. But in 2012, Peter Bishop and Lesley Williams had adopted more of a "better than nothing" approach in *The Temporary City*,[32] writing that in the absence of long-term solutions to dereliction and vacancy, temporary uses have become increasingly legitimate, and have allowed for the often overlooked fourth dimension of the city to come to the fore: that of time.

Commercialising place

22 In *Modernity at Large*, which was published in 1996, Arjun Appadurai shed light on the sense of acceleration brought about by the global circulation of people, goods and data. [33] This is nowhere more acute than in large metropolises like London. In their 2016 book *Cities Interrupted*, Shirley Jordan and Christoph Lindner identify moments of interruption, moments of stasis in the flow of constant urban development, and the pop up is one of them, a creative practice seeking to destabilize the experience of everyday urban life and the new narratives of mobility and hyper-growth which accompany it. Britain, and London more specifically, at the beginning of the 21st century are not simply about time passing, but about speed, its accelerated transformation measured in terms of its 'crane index' and estate regeneration. For major global cities, the term 'super-gentrification' was created to describe how already gentrified inner London areas like Islington and Barnsbury are being transformed at speed by super wealthy professionals working in the City, with the price of prime housing reaching stellar heights now inaccessible to anyone outside of this elite.[34]

23 Making more intensive use of urban space, both public and private, can be both a commercial and an anti-commercial venture. But it is the spectacular capital growth derived from fast turnover times which has naturalised the monetisation of temporariness and flexibility, as exemplified by Airbnb and the pop up hotels they conjure up in private apartments and homes around the world. In a 2015 *Guardian* piece entitled "Cult of the Temporary", Ella Harris and Mel Nowicki, the two founders of the Precarious Geographies project at Royal Hollaway, pointed out that the immobility of real estate has long been a hindrance to fast economic growth, and that "pop-ups could well be the culmination of a capitalist dream—submitting not just products but places to its economic logics."[35]

24 The flexibility of space has found a remarkable expression in the London phenomenon of guardian schemes in which cheap short-term tenancies, which can be ended at very

short notice, help companies protect their properties against squatters.[36] Local authorities have also adopted the idea, with the south London council of Lewisham even coming up with a "pop-up village" to move local residents in need of rehousing around vacant sites awaiting redevelopment.

25 In her recent book *Big Capital* (the subhead of which asks the question: *Who is London For?*), Anna Minton argues that the housing crisis which has gripped the city since 2008 is no longer a mere market problem of supply and demand, but is linked to global capital flows which skew supply towards investors by providing rates of return which are greater than the rate of economic growth. No longer considered a social good, housing has been transformed, through acceleration, into assets by the winners of the recession. Through a domino effect, these winners have driven out of central London—and of London altogether—not simply the poor, but also the middle classes. This recent phenomenon—which, Minton defends, is altogether different from the earlier, much slower, phenomenon of gentrification which has shaped London and most large cities since the 1980s—has changed the social make-up of London as well as its skyline. The concept of "gentrification" was indeed first used in the context of London, when Marxist sociologist Ruth Glass coined it to describe the supplanting of traditional blue-collar occupants of Islington and Notting Hill by better-off "bohemians" who had started renovating quaint old Victorian houses to their taste. By finding a word which could highlight the class struggle underpinning such urban changes, Glass wished to stress the negative consequences of the phenomenon in a way the word "regeneration" had not been able to do. Still, gentrification has also been defended as allowing for the rebuilding of derelict sites and the saving of architectural heritage. It seems however that the spectacular recent transformation of Kensington or of the riverside stretching from Nine Elms to Southwark, with the construction of endless rows of luxury buildings, has taken the notion of gentrification a step further. Minton quotes a London Assembly report which states that between 2005 and 2015, fifty estates comprising 30,000 homes were subject to estate regeneration schemes which, while they did double the number of homes, also increased the number of private residences tenfold by suppressing 8,000 socially rented accommodation.[37] By inviting the public in while also capitalizing on empty expanses, what the pop up does, whether wittingly or not, is participate in the blurring of the difference between public and private space.

Privatising the city in the experience economy

26 Britain, and London more particularly, has been at the forefront of a privatisation of public space. Under New Labour, the government devised a new strategic policy for improving public areas under the responsibility of local councils, setting a new agenda for the tidying up and reclamation of public space. Progressively faced with insufficient public funding since the 1980s, local authorities decided to adopt a new public space management regime and, through the London Enterprise Partnership, encouraged promoters to take on some responsibility for maintaining the public domain surrounding their private investments. The ambivalence of commercialised public spaces was formalised within Business Improvement Districts (BIDs), areas within which local businesses are encouraged to invest beyond their private premises. The legislation enabling the formation of BIDs was passed in 2004, and the first BID started in 2005.[38] By taking charge of their environment, and in a way annexing it, they decide

to provide "additional or improved services," all summed up under the phrase "environmental measures."[39] By taking care of adjoining public lanes and squares, promoters can ensure that they are considered high end, that they are prettified with the appropriate street furniture, that they are kept clean, but also safe. With the private sector in charge, the needs of shop owners are met, and the prices of buildings are driven up, but the responsibility for shaping the environment also changes hands, shifting from public authority (in London, the Mayor and the GLA) to private businesses —with some public funds still allocated to boost the development of BIDs. In some areas, public space has become an experience, a product capable of generating profit, and a safe investment on which benefits can be made. In some cases, the street comes to resemble a shopping mall. And because making public space attractive also implies that it should be made safe, BIDs have become exclusionary spaces. Strategies for this include the deterrence of surveillance, but also the inclusion of obstacles designed to avoid loitering, which somewhat defeat their public nature.

Pop ups and public art

27 Beyond institutional critique, sites, and therefore reflections on varying degrees of publicness, have also become one of the main new perspectives of art. Recent writings of Claire Bishop and Boris Groys have identified installations, most often ephemeral, site-specific, and large-scale, as the leading art form of contemporary art which make space an integral part of the work.[40] This has been coupled with the changing nature of the sites where contemporary site-specific works are located, and which often prioritise private property and retail.

28 Two recent examples of temporary public works being harnessed for non-cultural agendas concern the areas of King's Cross and Southwark. From May 2015 to October 2016, Of Soil and Water: King's Cross Pond Club was an installation in the form of a natural bathing pond in Lewis Cubitt Park, right behind the station, in the middle of the King's Cross development site. It took the concept of immersion literally by allowing visitors to bathe in a work of art. The piece was exemplary of a systematic use of interim art installations for the purpose of regeneration, as well as of the importance of regeneration sponsorship and commissions to artists' careers and livelihoods, in contexts where they work in collaboration with architects. The work was part of a public art program called Relay, a name which stresses the "in-betweeness" of the work, but also its utility for future projects for the zone.

29 In Southwark, the area of Elephant and Castle was designated for a controversial intensive redevelopment in which many long-term residents were forced to move out, often far from their familiar surroundings and local communities in London. The pop up art projects which were planned for the emptying flats and buildings were viewed negatively as cosmetic interventions meant to help sell the improved estate. In this context, a project planned at the Heygate by the independent commissioning agency Artangel was thwarted by residents after a long campaign. Local committees felt the plan for a pyramid to be built by Mike Nelson thanks to a reconfiguration of empty flats was not going to represent the lived experiences of the people who had called these buildings home. Nor was it going to comment on the injustice of their eviction.[41] They dissuaded Artangel to go ahead with their next spectacular ephemeral site-specific—though probably not site-specific enough—artwork. Mara Ferreri has observed how

other smaller pop up artistic interventions installed in the estate were clearly recognizable as urban fillers, and therefore opponents of the redevelopment suspected them of being complicit with the Council's plans and private developers' interests.[42] In this case, the "meanwhile" space had become a minefield.

"Art in Empty Spaces"

30 The cultural occupation of interim spaces, disused shops, houses or buildings paved the way for a more mainstream interest in transitional endeavours. Pop up galleries and stores began sprouting in cities everywhere, their temporary quality granting them the seductive aura of trendiness and novelty. These occupations have seemed to suffer from the growing similarity between artistic and commercial projects.

31 At the beginning of the 21st century, temporary projects often aligned with neighbourhood defence of public spaces against capitalist appropriation. But once temporary uses became professional, they moved into the mainstream. They have now become associated with the highest end of retailing in the form of the pop up store which, because it offers exclusivity, not simply in terms of price or of quantity, but also in terms of time, appeals to the luxury industry. Some creative explorations which run counter to any notions of commercialisation can still prove desirable for the owners of the property involved. The negativity attached to vacant spaces, especially in a time of recession, can find a quick fix in interim occupations. Mara Ferreri has remarked that Britain pioneered official support for such practices with the help of the Department for Communities and Local Government and of ACE:

> That this may be the language and rationale of neoliberal urban policy-makers in Britain is not unpredictable. Haunted by the image of boarded-up high streets, non-commercial temporary empty space reuse has been advocated through policies and public funding schemes throughout 2009 and 2010 "to help reinvigorate ailing town centres during the recession" and to encourage "temporary activities that benefit the local community" (DCLG, 2009), particularly through arts-related activities (ACE, 2009).[43]

32 Indeed, in 2009, the then-director of ACE Alan Davey announced the launch of the "Art in Empty Spaces Initiative", a £500,000 investment to help individual artists and small arts organisations "turn vacant high street shops into vibrant artistic places."[44] Run in partnership with the Department for Communities and Local Government's scheme "Looking after our town centres", the idea behind "Art in Empty Spaces" was to make sure that town centres were not deserted and that, between more traditional occupations, empty spaces and shops could still attract visitors: considered as desirable "footfall" they continued to be potential customers for the shops which haven't closed. Some organisations started creating an infrastructure around the pop up, acting as facilitators of temporary spatial reuse in London: the Space Makers Agency in Brixton, Future Communities, the Meanwhile Foundation, or the Empty Shops Network run by artist Dan Thompson who had set up his first pop up gallery in a disused bakery in Worthing in 2001. More commercial ventures have also sprung up, such as Appear [Here], which is a marketplace for temporarily empty spaces where you can book by the day.

33 This means that while ephemeral art might obviously deal with works which do not appreciate in monetary value over time and might seem less concerned with their imprint on urban life, this ephemeral quality has nonetheless acquired a new weight at

the turn of the twenty-first century. Transitivity is suddenly being capable of addressing the new challenges the post-modern city faces and complying with its new timeframes.

Deflecting instrumentalization

34 The use of spaces which had lain fallow in the wake of the 2008 financial crisis were soon exploited and even gained some attractiveness. Yet, just like graffiti was progressively absorbed into the mainstream art market, the countercultural nature of ephemeral usage and *détournement* has sometimes seemed to merely adopt its fashionable guise and amateurish aesthetics to in fact work as a facilitator for the acceleration of a global flux and for the monetisation of time and space.[45]

35 In *Fair Play,* Jen Harvie also repeatedly uses the expression "pop-up venues," to talk about today's ephemeral site-specific art. The pop up spaces used by artists, temporarily empty because they are not rented out, or awaiting renovation or demolition, have the potential to become temporary autonomous zones, or TAZ, as theorised in 1985 by Hakim Bey, but she also sees them as a harnessing of resources in a situation of under-funding. Indeed, when an increasingly high number of empty shops and estates are made available through the effects of the recession, their temporary use by artists saves owners costs on security, maintenance and business rates taxed on empty buildings. Just like the occupants of the Heygate estate, Harvie questions the automatic political credentials they often assume to derive from occupying disused or derelict buildings—and in this she is wary of projects such as Landy's *Break Down* or Hiorns' *Seizure*. While Bourriaud builds on the Marxist idea of interstices, spaces for exchange that escape from the dominant ideology of capitalism to promote artists' relational interventions, she contends that there are no such safe spaces. She believes the sometimes-professed ability of "pop up" contemporary works to enact social change simply because they are created within the community is compromised by risks of co-optation by a liberal agenda. In this, she agrees with the critics of relational aesthetics and their micro-utopias, in particular British art historian Claire Bishop, who condemn their merging of commercialism and activism into benign interventions that simply confirm, under the guise of social inclusivity, the exclusivity of the contemporary art world.

Conclusion

36 In the aftermath of the global financial crisis, and its political response in many Western European countries through regimes of austerity urbanism, the promised magic of pop up, interim and "meanwhile" uses rapidly became a panacea for many urban ailments, shifting from the cultural margins to the very centre of cities. Vacant spaces have been increasingly presented by urban policy makers as the most visible negative symptom of the global recession, and as detrimental to the return of consumers' and investors' confidence. In an effort to counter negative perceptions, temporary projects seem to offer a quick-fix solution in the form of positive visual and experiential fillers, which could transform a failed or stalled redevelopment project into an attractive event. The assimilation of temporary use into mainstream urban

policy and planning indeed allows for looser planning and lighter budgets – while governments wait for the economy to take a turn for the better.

37 Pop ups thrived and changed in Britain while the country was going through the financial and economic crisis of 2008. The 2020 coronavirus crisis is bound to have some of the same effects on the country's retail industry and could even have a more drastic impact. In April 2020, Julia Kollewe wrote in the *Guardian* that "the coronavirus pandemic will 'vastly accelerate' the decline of the British high street, where the number of shops could more than halve in the next two years."[46] Will the same solutions based on the dynamics of the pop up be applied? The climate crisis means that simply trying to sustain footfall and business might not be sufficient, and that the interstices of towns and cities might have to truly become spaces for change rather than simply for exchange. Also, artists have encountered rising difficulties and opposition when making use of interim spaces: as this article demonstrates, the possible monetisation of the space-time combination of pop ups has become more conspicuous. This new awareness made Marc Quinn's occupation of the Colston plinth problematic, because he is both white and an artist with great means. It meant Roger Hiorns had no problem transforming an old council flat in Southwark in 2008, but Mike Nelson could no longer do so at the Heygate in 2013.

38 The pop up format's power as an activist tool and its artistic potency have made it a very attractive model for business, just like art so often serves as the—mostly uncredited—R&D branch of advertising. A desire, emanating both from the private and the public spheres, to avoid boarded-up high streets at all cost has led to its wide use in the rapidly transforming cities of Britain. But while gentrification usually follows artists, can artists then follow the supergentrification of British cities, and of London in particular, and counteract their commodification? Activists have often made use of artistic performances in the city and vice versa: artists have been inspired by militant tactics like Occupy, or the earlier demonstrations on Greenham Common. Still, are artists working outside the institution today still able to contribute to the design of a shared forum once their ephemeral occupation of in-between spaces is hijacked by commerce and real estate? All the more so when museums themselves, and Tate Modern in particular, are now designed as public spaces where people can see art, but also do many other things like socialise, eat, talk and take pictures. These artists' autonomy has become compromised, because public spaces are increasingly privatised, and because art is sensitive to its context and emerges from it. The pop up thus points to a redefinition of both private or public space, but also of the terms of cultural encounters.

39 The double nature of the pop up, both utopian and pragmatic, is at the core of the recent tension which has manifested itself in the reception and interpretation of ephemeral, site-specific artistic projects. The question therefore emerges: can artists, the pioneers of the pop up, still tap into the creative potential of the interim occupation of empty spaces after the latter have been monetised by business and property development? A way of dealing with this question would be to ask whether the pop up project one happens to study, while definitely being a symptom of the acceleration of global flows as well as a useful tool for regeneration, actually interrupts, or accelerates the constant urban flux. Hopefully, ephemeral interventions in unusual places can still prevent their utopian creativity being cancelled by commerce. Artists like Jeremy Deller have demonstrated that the art itself can still reveal the power

relations at work in its environment, Tino Sehgal has experimented with modes of dematerialisation for the 21st century, and many artists have proposed short-term installations on empty plinths that have commented on the power structures of their setting, among them Yinka Shonibare and his 2010 postcolonial *Nelson's Ship in a Bottle* on the empty Fourth Plinth in Trafalgar Square. This goes to show that such interruptions are still possible.

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NOTES

1. Quinn is famous for another work using a traditional but empty plinth, his 2005 contribution to the Fourth Plinth commissions on London's Trafalgar Square with *Alison Lapper Pregnant*. He is indeed known for negotiating representations of the body by using traditional material and traditionally outcast subjects.
2. @biggiesnug, 7 June 2020, the picture showed Reid on the plinth with the caption: "My wife. My life. She matters."
3. "A joint statement from Marc Quinn and Jen Reid" 15 June, 2020, http://marcquinn.com/studio/news/a-joint-statement-from-marc-quinn-and-jen-reid, last accessed 21 July, 2020.
4. https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2020/jul/17/magic-of-mushrooms-marc-quinn-pop-up-protester-the-week-in-art, last accessed 18 July, 2020.
5. See the *Bristol Post* website https://www.bristolpost.co.uk/news/bristol-news/unofficial-plaque-calling-bristol-capital-690950, last accessed 25 July, 2020.
6. Judith Evans, "Bristol, the slave trade and a reckoning with the past," 9 August, 2018, https://www.ft.com/content/032fe4a0-9a96-11e8-ab77-f854c65a4465, last accessed 25 July, 2020.
7. The post read: "What should we do with the empty plinth in the middle of Bristol? Here's an idea that caters for both those who miss the Colston statue and those who don't. We drag him out the water, put him back on the plinth, tie cable round his neck and commission some life size bronze statues of protestors in the act of pulling him down. Everyone happy. A famous day commemorated."

8. Vanessa Thorpe, "Sculptor unveils 'black everywoman' as UK row over statues and race grows," 19 July, 2020, https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2020/jul/19/sculptor-unveils-black-everywoman-as-uk-row-over-statues-and-race-grows, last accessed 25 July, 2020.
9. The expression pop up has flourished to describe short-term artistic or cultural events. The redundantly named "Pop Up Festival" was organised in 2012 in King's Cross, London.
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36. Dot, dot, dot, Global Guardians, Lowe Guardians, and Ad Hoc, are just a few of the many social enterprises connecting would-be tenants and the owners of empty properties. The status of property guardians was humorously depicted in Phoebe Waller-Bridge's 2016 television series *Crashing*.
37. Anna Minton, *Big Capital. Who is London For?* (London: Penguin Random, 2017), viii-ix.
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39. Accessed October 10, 2015, https://www.london.gov.uk/priorities/business-economy/vision-and-strategy/focus-areas/business-improvement-districts, now offline.
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41. For a more detailed description of the sequence of events which led to Nelson's collaboration with Artangel being scrapped, see my book *Artangel and Financing British Art. Adapting to Social and Economic Change* (New York and London: Routledge, 2019), 107-110.
42. Ferreri, "Pop-up Shops as Interruptions in (Post-)recessional London," 141-157, see also Mara Ferreri and Valeria Graziano, "Passion without Objects. Young Graduates and the Politics of Temporary Art Spaces", *Recherches sociologiques et anthropologiques* 45, no. 2 (2014): 85-101.
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ABSTRACTS

This article explores the pop up phenomenon in the context of turn-of-the-century Britain, namely objects of visibility which have appeared and then, even more importantly, disappeared in public space. The pop up phenomenon, which has been a popular object of study for cultural geographers, while also commanding attention in marketing and public policy studies, evokes a composite and sometimes contradictory imaginary: the temporary, the alternative, the exclusive, the democratic, the experimental, the low-budget, the luxurious, the insurgent. They are short-term shops, makeshift cinemas, or plug-in restaurants, their temporary quality granting them the seductive aura of trendiness. But these are not just venues or outlets, their ephemeral nature and incongruous siting have turned them into experiences, transformative happenings which provide more than simply what they present or sell. Their added value comes from the inspiration they draw from guerrilla events, from in-between cultural occupations and from new public art and its ephemeral, site-specific interventions outside the gallery. By looking at recent examples of short-term interventions in public space which have been described as pop ups, and by exploring the latter's roots in activist and artistic practice, I wish to explain the appeal of the pop up as well as its relationship to a city in flux. At stake is the question whether the possibility remains for artists to resist the control of forces at work outside the institution, in the streets or buildings they like to explore. Indeed, is it still possible for artists—the actual pioneers of the pop up—to tap into the creative potential of the interim occupation of empty spaces after the latter have been instrumentalised by public authorities, monetised by business and by fashion brands, and, probably more importantly, used by real estate developers to hike up prices?

INDEX

Keywords: contemporary British art, occupational art, pop up, micro-utopias, placemaking, marketing, instrumentalisation, gentrification

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